

Neighborhood Ten Study Committee
Committee Meeting # 13
Open Space
November 21, 2005

Committee members present: Peter Sturges, John Moukad, Chip Strang, Rebekah Kaufman, Joan Marszaleck

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Elaine Thorne

Presentation:

The meeting began with a presentation on open space in Neighborhood Ten, including open space policy, park renovations, and open space acquisition, summarized below

Open space policy

It was noted that the City's open space policies are guided by several documents:

- Growth Policy Document (1993)
- Neighborhood Studies and Updates (1989 – present)
- Report of the Green Ribbon Open Space Committee (2000)
- Open Space Survey (2002)
- Open Space Plan Update (2004)

Park renovations

Most public parks in Cambridge undergo total renovations as needed and as funding is available. Generally, throughout the renovation process, members of the public including neighbors and users of the park and city staff have different roles.

The public provides important information on:

- Park use
- Issues and or problems with the park
- Open Space needs in the neighborhood
- Desired park uses and preferences
- Feedback on concept plans

City staff is responsible for:

- Planning and analysis using recent studies and data, maps, technical knowledge, and experience
- Meeting facilitation
- Design

Park maintenance

Park maintenance is frequently noted as an important issue throughout the city. The Department of Public Works (DPW) has a division dedicated to parks and urban forestry and within that division is the Park Maintenance Program. Staff and resources within the program are divided into 3 geographic districts for a more efficient response to park maintenance needs (Neighborhood Ten is in District 3).

Open space acquisition

Strategies used by the City for open space acquisition include

- *Report of the Green Ribbon Open Space Committee*, which provides recommendations on the criteria for open space acquisition, identifies areas of the City in need of different types of open space, and recommends priority areas.
- *The Community Preservation Act*, approved by voters allocates funding to affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space.
- *The Cambridge Zoning Ordinance* is a tool often used by the City to encourage, and in some cases, require the creation of new public open space by private developers.

Open space in Neighborhood Ten

There are 9 public parks in Neighborhood Ten. The neighborhood has about 4.75 acres of public open space per 1,000 residents, compared to the city as a whole at 5.14 acres per 1,000 residents.

According to findings in the Report of the Green Ribbon Open Space Committee, parts of Neighborhood Ten are in need of increased access to Tot Lots, Neighborhood Parks, and Community Parks¹.

Discussion:

Much of the discussion centered on strategies to improve maintenance on state owned public open space. Lowell Park, located at the intersection of Brattle Street, Fresh Pond Parkway, and Mount Auburn Street, was noted in particular. Lowell Park, owned by the state and managed through the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), consists of approximately 3 acres of grassy area with some pathways.

One committee member stated that the area is not well maintained and also very dark at night, which makes it feel unsafe. It was also mentioned that residents don't tend to use the park as a destination or a community amenity but rather as a cut through route.

It was noted that picnic tables and some benches might be nice additions to the space. Committee members also suggested that the City explore the possibility of taking over maintenance responsibilities and improvements at Lowell Park. Committee members agreed that due to its size and location, Lowell Park has the potential to be a very valuable open space amenity for Neighborhood Ten. Someone pointed out that the crosswalk improvements mentioned in earlier transportation discussions would also be beneficial. Another committee member stated that if the park could be better protected from the busy surrounding streets, it would get a tremendous amount of use. It was added that if the park were made more inviting, people would use it regardless of the traffic situation nearby.

Some members of the committee felt that the portion of Lowell Park which lies south of Fresh Pond Parkway may be appropriate for a dedicated off leash dog area.

¹ According to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA): **Tot Lots** – smaller and intended to serve children under 12 years old and should be within ¼ mile walking distance of users. **Neighborhood Parks** – about 5 to 10 acres and feature informal active and passive uses (playgrounds, ball fields, benches, etc.) Should serve population within ¼ mile to ½ mile walking distance. **Community Parks** – intended to serve more than one neighborhood and have facilities for formal organized recreational activities.

The Committee agreed that the lack of maintenance and investment is a concern for almost all of the public parks and open space along the Charles River. There was some discussion as to whether it made more sense, based on the benefits to the community and city as a whole, for the City to focus on maintenance strategies for the Charles River. It was noted, however, that there are a lot of private groups that already advocate for the Charles River, while Lowell Park has no such backing.

The Committee was generally satisfied with the condition of public parks throughout neighborhood that are maintained by the City. Parks in the neighborhood were noted as important places for neighborhood residents and families to meet and socialize. There were some suggestions to add benches and tables at Larch Road Park as well as Kingsley Park in Fresh Pond Reservation. There was also a suggestion to improve the tennis courts at Glacken Field. Although the tennis courts are located in Strawberry Hill, the Committee recognized they are the closest such facilities to most of Neighborhood Ten, and many neighborhood residents use them. Committee members felt there was a need for some kind of community center in Neighborhood Ten, in order to provide indoor recreational opportunities for families during the winter months.

A committee member stated that the public open space needs for Neighborhood Ten, mentioned in the Report of the Green Ribbon Open Space Committee were still evident. Someone asked if there are any groups dedicated to raising money for parks and open space acquisition.

The Study Committee also briefly discussed some other, more general, topics before closing. It was mentioned that often trash accumulates on the street near bus stops and other busy locations. The bus stop at the corner of Reservoir Street and Huron Avenue was noted in particular. Someone asked how to get the city to place additional trashcans on the street especially at these locations. Staff responded that they would look into what the criteria is for placing additional trashcans on the street.

In a follow up to a previous discussion, someone expressed some concern about recommending only dedicated affordable housing at the business area of Fresh Pond Parkway, and felt that if the site is redeveloped it should be mixed use. Furthermore, that the percentage of affordable units should not be determined in the neighborhood study recommendation. Another committee member countered that affordable housing should be a top priority Citywide and stated that the City is losing middle-income residents. There was a suggestion to create an electronic message board for Neighborhood Ten.